

2002 Legislative Report



Representative

Mike Armstrong (R) 12th District

Olympia office:

404 John L. O'Brien Bldg.
Olympia, Wash. 98504-0600
360-786-7832

E-mail:

armstron_mi@leg.wa.gov

Committees:

Transportation
Capital Budget-
Vice Ranking Republican
Juvenile Justice
Republican Assistant Whip

Toll-free Hotline:

1-800-562-6000

Dear friends,

With the new year upon us, I hope this letter finds you and your loved ones healthy and happy. While many changes have taken place in Olympia, with the Democrats gaining control in the House, I am excited about the challenges that lay before us and look forward to the opportunity to continue to serve the 12th District.

The 2002 legislative session is going to be about many things: leadership, and priorities. My priorities are clear: to adopt a budget that addresses the state's needs without increasing taxes; address our transportation needs responsibly while making sure that transportation projects in Eastern Washington are not overshadowed by gridlock in the Puget Sound area; and work to meet the varying needs of our district.

It's not that the state doesn't bring in enough money (\$22 billion). The issue is how we spend that money. Most of you understand that we cannot tax and spend our way into prosperity.

Please contact my office whenever you want to share your thoughts on the decisions before us, or if you need help dealing with a state agency. And if you are in Olympia during the session, be sure to stop in for a cup of coffee and tell me what's on your mind.

Sincerely,

Mike Armstrong



Do away with government's fat, not its front line

Unfortunately, the budget adopted last summer to pay for state government operations has collapsed already. The shortfall is reported to be at least \$1.25 billion and may get even bigger when the next economic forecast is issued in February.

While repairing the budget won't be easy, our first priority should be to reduce spending and force government to live within its means, just like working families do when times get tough.

While in office, Gov. Locke has allowed the state workforce to grow at a rate of more than 3,200 jobs every two years - that's like adding the population of Cashmere, and then some. Now he's only willing to reduce government by a mere 440 positions, or a little more than one-half of 1 percent of the state workforce. Our state's agricultural industry and the businesses in North Central Washington should be so lucky.

I believe we need to preserve the essential services government provides - especially the services available to those in need. We need to put the brakes on one of the fastest-growing areas of state government: a personnel system for mid-level managers called the Washington Management Service.

The number of WMS positions has grown *more than 1,000 percent* in seven years. WMS lets state agencies do away with front-line positions and create a new layer of management. It lets them hand out exorbitant pay raises. It throws off the balance between management and the front-line workers who actually provide services, and that

puts public services at risk when times get tough. When the governor calls for budget cuts, whose jobs will those managers eliminate first? Not their own.

That's why I introduced legislation (House Bill 1516) last year that called for a 10 percent limit on WMS positions. It would have forced agencies to allocate their WMS positions more responsibly, help restore the balance of management and workers, and save some hefty salaries in the process. Although the bill had wide support, it didn't make it to a committee vote.

This year, however, with Democrats desperate to stop the budget's bleeding, I'm pushing for a 7 percent WMS limit, and the chairwoman of the House State Government Committee already has vowed to give my bill a hearing. This is just one example of what we can do to put state agencies on a strict diet, with minimal loss to the citizens they serve directly.

What you should know about this letter...



Because positions in the House will be on the election ballot this year, I am limited to two "mailings" to you, my constituents, between now and November. This letter is the first of my mailings for the year. You will receive the second after the 2002 session concludes.

However, that does not preclude me from responding to letters I receive from you throughout the year. With that said, I want to encourage you to feel free to contact my office with any questions or concerns that you have. I look forward to hearing from you!



Too many regulations,
not enough jobs

The Growth Management Act was written for our state’s three largest counties – King, Pierce, and Snohomish – and tried to address the problems they had in those counties. Unfortunately, one size does not fit all in this state. Furthermore, GMA has caused one of the biggest obstacles to attracting good-paying jobs to our communities. In the 11 years since it was passed, the GMA has caused home prices to soar in many areas, made traffic congestion in the urban Puget Sound area much worse, and discouraged economic development in rural areas, like our part of the state.

This session I have introduced a bill allowing any county defined as “rural” under the Growth Management Act (that means a population density of less than 100 persons per square mile, which includes all of the 12th District) to “opt out” of the act. If the bill passes, all it would take to opt out is a “yes” vote from the county

commissioners and a majority vote by either the cities within the county or the entire county population.

Let’s allow the people who live here, not bureaucrats hundreds of miles away, to decide how much their communities should be able to grow.

Expect transportation debate
to make return trip

Here in North Central Washington, we understand the importance of a good transportation network. Unfortunately, the people may not get the chance to decide that on their own.

While Washington made it through 2001 without an increase in the gas tax, this year may prove to be different. The governor is pushing a transportation funding package built around a 9-cent gas tax increase over the next three years. We saw a similar proposal from the governor last year. The governor conveniently blamed that plan’s failure on House Republicans, but now that Democrats are the majority party in the House, they have the votes to raise transportation taxes at any time.

Gov. Locke promised over and over last year that a transportation funding package would go to a vote of the people. He went back on his word last summer and is doing the same thing now. Even worse, the governor has sent an implied threat to legislators: if we don’t vote for his plan, road improvements planned in our districts may not be completed, and cuts in funding for human services in our districts will have less chance of being restored. In other words, it’s his way or no highways – and maybe no health care, either. I don’t like my vote being held hostage.

I’m confident a reasonable transportation-funding package would get public support if it looked like it was responsible and fair to people across the state. However, I believe it must be put to a vote of the people whose lives would be directly impacted by a gas tax increase.